

Daily Herald, January 3, 2007

In what could be a split from the Bush administration's proposed new Iraq strategy, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said today he wants to reduce the number of U.S. troops in that country.

"My hope is that we actually wind down the U.S. troops and not increase them," the Highland Park Republican said at a press conference outlining his agenda for Congress' next session, which begins Thursday.

Kirk did not specify how soon troops should be brought home.

"We shouldn't set a timetable because we should have a strategy of winning in Iraq and not losing," he said. "The U.S. and our allies should be working to develop a strengthening government in Iraq."

According to a BBC report published Tuesday, President Bush's new Iraq strategy will call for sending more troops to Iraq in an effort to quell violence.

The report predicted Bush will reveal the new plan in a speech within days.

Kirk visited Iraq two weeks ago along with a Congressional delegation that included U.S. Sens. Joseph Lieberman, a Connecticut Democrat, and John McCain, an Arizona Republican.

McCain, a possible presidential hopeful in 2008, said after the Baghdad trip he favors deploying about 15,000 to 30,000 more troops to quell sectarian violence that grips the fledgling democracy.

Kirk said the minority Iraqi Sunnis will lose in the sectarian clashes with other ethnic sects.

“It’s a conflict in which the 3 million Sunnis, up against 20 million Kurds and Shiias, will not prevail,” he said.

Asked if the execution of Iraq’s deposed dictator Saddam Hussein is exacerbating the violence, Kirk said this is not the time to question the Iraqi government’s decisions.

“There may be times that we disagree with what we are seeing,” he said “But it is a critical time for increased sovereignty and control by Iraqis.”